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AUTHOR Samuels, Frank
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ABSTRACT

When a new administration came to Michigan's Wayne County Community College (WCCC) in 1985, the college evidenced several characteristics of a failing institution: poor media image, continuing budget deficits, declining enrollments, and probationary accrediation status. To address these problems and the demoralization that had accompanied them, the new administration attempted to reorganize the institution to create a professionally sustaining environment conducive to student learning. To create a psychological climate for change and establish a basis for trust and dialogue, the following actions were taken: (1) the administration met with faculty and staff groups to determine their assessment of the condition of the college; (2) a statement of values was developed to serve as a normative standard and guide for the professional lives of the faculty; (3) participatory structures were developed to involve administrators, faculty, and staff in decision making; (4) district administration was redesigned and strengthened to establish clear lines of authority and accessibility of services; (5) WCCC's mission was redefined to emphasize quality and standards; (6) a strategic planning process was introduced to clarify the challenges facing WCCC and fashion appropriate solutions; (7) a system of program review and evaluation was developed, resulting in the creation of new programs and the deletion of others, the redesign of course offerings, and the establishment of degree standards; and (8) mandatory basic skills testing and course placement was introduced, along with a remedial/developmental program and a range of student support services. As a result of these efforts, WCCC currently enjoys a positive image in the media, enrollment increases of almost 10% over the past two semesters, and a return to full accreditation status. (EJV)

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A FOCUS ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE REVITALIZATION OF THE ACADEMIC DIVISION AT WAYNE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Frank Samuels
Senior Vice President
for Academic Affairs
Wayne County Community College

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A FOCUS ON QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE REVITALIZATION OF THE ACADEMIC DIVISION AT WAYNE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Wayne County Community College is a publicly supported two-year comprehensive community college. WCCC is part of a statewide system of 29 community colleges. The College's service area encompasses 520 square miles with a population of about 2.3 million reflecting a rich mosaic of ethnic and cultural styles and includes both urban and suburban as well as rural areas.

The founding of Wayne County Community was a positive reaction to the Detroit urban insurrection of 1967. The belief current at the time, was that many of the issues and problems against which the citizenry were in revolt, lent themselves to solutions that were educational in nature.

When the College opened its doors in September, 1969, it was immediately apparent that the College was addressing a felt need in the community for education and training as well as individual and community improvements. The initial enrollment was predicted to be 2,000 students. However, on the first day of classes, over 8,000 students were enrolled. In a period of eight years, WCCC became the second largest community college in the state with an enrollment of 24,000 students. The College was truly community-based, providing easy access to individuals throughout the county. The College utilized churches, schools and public housing facilities to deliver its educational programs. A serious effort was made to bring community and College resources to bear on the myriad problems affecting the community.

It was this beginning, Detroit based, in the aftermath of tragedy, the experimental and sprawling nature of the initial enterprise, that paradoxically,

remains the college's promise and is a major part of its problems. The organizational values, personal attitudes and institutional style of these formative years, still constitute the controlling sensibility of the institution. The structures, policies and practices developed to address these unique early situations and burgeoning enrollments, although adaptive then, proved fundamentally maladaptive in the subsequent administration of five campuses, an eroding financial base and a catastrophic drop in enrollment.

When the Temple administration began, the College was in a disintegrative spiral which started in 1980. During this period, the College lost half of its enrollment, witnessed a succession of five presidents, was placed on probation by the North Central Association and was taken over by the State Department of Public Instruction. There were two critical problems confronting this administration given the College's culture and social organization and the widespread despair, and demoralization of the previous years. How could we reorganize the institution so that we could provide the conditions that would be professionally sustaining and create a constructive educational environment within which every student could learn. First, it was necessary to create a psychological climate for change without creating embittering antagonisms among faculty and staff. Secondly, we had to establish bases of trust and a framework for productive dialogue.

We were mindful of the fact that when new academic officers come to a troubled institution, there is always an incitement to change things immediately, in order to give an illusion of progress and to "criminalize" the environment--blaming the resident faculty and staff for the perceived ills of the institution. We resisted that temptation. At WCCC, the social relationships were too fragile, we eschewed harsh correctives. Our approach was incremental. I immediately opened a dialogue with faculty and staff groups along with individual faculty elders, to get

their assessment of the condition of the institution. Faculty and staff had rarely been brought into the debate about what sort of changes were relevant to the institution. We felt that a critical mass of the faculty and staff would have to make common cause if patterns of communication, interaction and instruction were to be altered.

We faced all the familiar problems of entry into a new society. Words such as "insiders" and "outsiders" were unavoidable habits of institutional expression, but they were not useful as meaningful descriptions of individual commitment to the College. In order to foster a sense of community, we devised a statement of values that would serve as a normative standard and a guide for the professional lives of the College staff. On ceremonial occasions and at faculty and staff meetings, we spoke about the idea of the institution and its founding principles, and the historical mission of the College. The North Central evaluation visit also provided a focus for common efforts and an exercise in mutual gains. It was a pivotal event, because the future of the institution and our own professional futures were tied to this outcome.

One of our first actions was to create participatory structures. Administrators are traditonally nervous about the participation of faculty and staff in decision-making. However, with three very strong unions, we had to create an alternative to the adversarial union/management relationships. We worked with various union groups to create the College Senate, an organization which became an important mechanism for checking the pulse of the institution. We also created a governance structure within the Academic Division which provided for departmental, divisional and campus input into the decision-making framework.

Although we are a single college district, the organization that we inherited was along the lines of operationally separate colleges. (It resembled a medieval cathedral. Each section built by warring factions of the church.) There was an absence of integrative mechanisms. The campus-centered administrative

structure encouraged parochialism and insularity. Faculty blamed the administration, and administration blamed the Board, the Board blamed the media. This attribution of blame became part of the folklore of the institution. A faculty group informed me soon after my arrival that the Board was on probation by the North Central Association, not the College. We had to contend with this collective self-deception. Responsibility for the condition of the institution was not accepted at any level.

The Campuses were free-floating entities, loosely connected to the central office. The imperatives were clear for a new management philosophy and organizational structure. We redesigned the system along the lines of a single college district, providing for clear lines of authority and accessibility of services on the Campuses. We rewrote job descriptions and implemented a performance evaluation program intended to assist supervisors and employees in setting realistic objectives and evaluating performance against a mutually agreed on set of objectives. We interfaced this with a merit pay system for exempt personnel.

One of the critical elements in the revitalization of the institution was the redefinition of mission, and an emphasis on quality and standards. We adopted a slogan "Committed to Quality" and made some very serious attempts to operationalize the concept. We introduced a strategic planning process, clarified the central challenges facing the institution and how we would fashion appropriate solutions that should move us on a planned rational basis, to higher levels of quality and effectiveness. Earlier, we found the planning process an excellent vehicle for disseminating the educational values and expectations of the College. Major emphasis was given to curriculum reform. There was a lack of quality control within the institution, program evaluation was episodic. We introduced a system of program review and evaluation. Course descriptions were reviewed. We reviewed all the programs within the College. New programs were added, others deleted.

We redesigned each course offering and designed an official course outline for each program of study. Course descriptions were reviewed. We also altered the College catalog to reflect these curriculum changes. For the first time, programs were designated by Campus, which allowed students to complete their programs of study on the campus of initial registration. A new policy was written with degree standards. A strong focus was placed on infrastructure repair and structural changes without neglecting the human side of the enterprise.

The Open Door concept had been taken literally. With the exception of the health professions, students simply walked into any curriculum within the College. We introduced mandatory ASSET testing and placment on all Campuses, and designed and implemented a remedial/developmental program along with a range of supportive services. We established learning labs on each campus and appointed a Director of Support Services. The high attrition rate plaguing the institution, indicated a compelling need for a creative and innovative remedial and developmental program. To encourage diversity in the entering competencies of the student body, we balanced developmental studies with an honors program. But most importantly, we reintroduced the faculty to its proper role in the retention of students. Previously, the faculty taught their 15 hours and fled the campus. They scheduled classes according to their convenience and not student demand. They saw little relationship between their behavior and the market position of the institution. A precipitous drop in enrollment from 24,000 to 12,000 students and the threat of faculty layoffs helped to focus the attention of the faculty. Today, advising and faculty tutorials are becoming entrenched features of the institutional landscape. We are still attempting to enlist the energies of all the faculty in this effort.

One of the major complaints of the students was the scheduling process. A new set of procedures were put in place to organize the process. Scheduling is

now directed from the Provost's Office. We have effected major efficiencies. Class cancellations have been significantly reduced and class size averages have moved from 16 to 22, at considerable savings to the institution.

The College was drawing a disproportionate share of students from the lower-end of the educational spectrum. The faculty was not prepared to deal appropriately with these students. Faculty development was placed high on our agenda of concerns; such topics as critical thinking, reading and writing across the curriculum were explored in faculty seminars and workshops.

At Wayne County Comunty College, we believe that an effective institution must be characterized by teaching proficiency and an institutional climate that acknowledges and respects the unique character of the student population. The entire academic enterprise should be framed by the belief that every student can learn, if we provide them with an environment of learning, based on trust, honesty and freedom.

In conclusion, the institution has undergone a sea change. Three years ago, the College evidenced several characteristics of a failing institution--poor media image, continuing budget deficits, declining enrollments, and probation status by the North Central Association. Today, the College enjoys a positive press and enrollment increases of almost 10% the past two semesters. Our efforts have resulted in a return to full accreditation status granted by the North Central Association in March, 1988. There is now renewed hope and confidence as the College moves strategically toward its vision of the future.

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